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Peter B. Neubauer


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Anna Freud's Concept of Developmental Lines

PETER B. NEUBAUER, M.D.

ANNA FREUD'S MANY TALENTS AND HER CURIOSITY WERE without limit. She addressed herself with equal interest to psychoanalysis and its applications to many different fields and conditions. I shall not undertake to assess the significance of Anna Freud's contributions, for it may be too early to do this. There are, in my opinion, good reasons why Anna Freud's work does not at present lend itself to a full historical examination. In the changing emphasis on issues and topics, those who stay close to the central body of analytic theory and clinical practice may lose visibility. Those who set themselves apart or who add knowledge which cannot easily be integrated into the main body of psychoanalysis usually are conspicuous.

It was more than Anna Freud's filial role that led her to assert her dual aim of preserving the main body of Freud's propositions and constantly searching to expand psychoanalytic knowledge, which she then embedded in and connected with established psychoanalytic theory and practice.

She gave significant assistance to the birth of ego psychology without reducing the importance of drive, superego, and reality influences. When she established child psychoanalysis, she did not identify it as the "Anna Freud approach" or the "Anna Freud school." As she put it, there is only one classic analysis,

Director of the Child Development Center in New York; Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the Psychoanalytic Institute, New York University; and John B. Turner Lecturer, Columbia University.

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which is then applied to the condition of the child and modified for that purpose. One could say that she adopted a developmental position in regard to the evolvement of psychoanalysis, always exploring the unknown and, at the same time, maintaining continuity and tradition. She extended psychoanalytic concepts to encompass new findings. Whenever she discussed clinical data or theoretical terms, she preferred to start with a clear, limiting definition, and then proceeded to widen the reference and meaning in order to include the broader scope and the widening layers of psychoanalytic explorations. Thus, when I choose to focus on one of her contributions—the concept of developmental lines—this concept must be understood in the wider context in which Anna Freud presented it. This notion was in part an outgrowth of her general interest in assessment, which it undoubtedly aided, but her proposition also points to areas which still need to be explored. She suggests a clear approach to new investigations and outlines the steps which lead to new territories, thus guiding us toward unresolved problems that are central to the psychoanalytic theory of development.

In one of her last contributions (1983), she wrote, “If I myself were asked at this late date to embark on such a series of updated lectures [she refers here to four lectures entitled, “Introduction to Psychoanalysis for Teachers,” which she gave 50 years ago], I think I would attempt to engage the audience’s interest in all the further steps of the *humanizing process* which mark the child’s path from immaturity to maturity” (p. 108; my italics). This remarkable statement can be viewed either as an expression of Anna Freud’s application of psychoanalysis to the educational process, or as her emphasis on socialization, the influence of object relations on development. Anna Freud adds, “It may be the fault of our earlier teaching and its emphasis on the battle with the drives if these others [the steps in the humanizing process] are taken all too often for granted as mere consequences of growth and maturation. A concept of this kind is almost as far removed from the real state of affairs as the earlier myth of the ‘innocence of childhood’” (p. 108). Here she corrects the expectation that removal of undue repression and points of fixation or regression by modern child-rearing practices will reduce or eliminate neurotic symptoms and conflicts. The support of ego-

superego functions at the end of each stage of development does not guarantee that unevenness or deviation in development can be avoided. When we add the dynamic interplay of structural modalities and the dimension of developmental and maturational processes, we can appreciate the complexities of psychic functions—and it is precisely with regard to these complexities that Anna Freud's concept of developmental lines gains its significance.

Her contribution to the psychoanalytic theory of development has been as substantial as that of her *Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense* (1936) has been to the theory of ego functions and the practice of psychoanalysis. Anna Freud never extended the metapsychological points of view to include the developmental dimension as equal to the others. The developmental approach leads to observation, description, organization of data which involve the structural, adaptive, dynamic, and genetic considerations. Thus it is supraordinate to or part of all the metapsychological dimensions. In her book *Normality and Pathology in Childhood* (1965), she proposes that the outlining of developmental sequences is essential for the assessment of *normal* development. She considered the child's capacity to negotiate the progressive steps of maturation and development to be equal to the adult's capacity for a normal love and sex life and the capacity to work. Assessing pathology in reference to normal developmental processes differs from deducing normal development from pathology. Anna Freud (1975) states, "As child analysts, we thus acquire a view of average, so-called normal, development as the background against which infantile psychopathology can be assessed, while as analysts of adults our glimpses of normality are always seen through and against the background of psychopathological manifestations" (p. x). Furthermore, Anna Freud firmly believed that normality *and* pathology in childhood should be measured against expectable developmental progression; thus she needed a comprehensive outline of development. In view of the child's ever-changing organization, she sought to move away from diagnostic assessments which are static and descriptive primarily of the impairment of function, rather than the resulting impairment of development. She undertook this, not so much in order to focus on psychoanalytic developmental

theories, but rather, always being the clinician, in order to arrive at the appropriate diagnostic statements and to assist in the indications for and evaluations of the treatment intervention. These concerns led first to the development of the Diagnostic Profile, an instrument built upon all aspects of psychoanalytic metapsychology. When even this type of comprehensive assessment, however, gave no clue to the interaction between, e.g., drive and ego-superego development, she proposed the concept of lines of development.

From the very beginning Freud outlined the libidinal phases and later added the vicissitudes of aggressive drive at each stage of phase organization. These drive organizations are based on *maturational* sequences. Conflict and conflict resolution in each phase could be clearly formulated, thereby giving us access to the understanding of the infantile neurosis and the characterological equivalents based on oral, anal, phallic conflicts and the evolvement of secondary autonomy.

It is as yet not possible to describe succeeding *ego organization* with the same clarity as the libidinal phase organization. Our knowledge of ego function, the ego apparatus, the construction of reality, and the defensive maneuvers of the ego has not yet led to the ordering of ego functions into organized developmental units. Indeed, the search for a parallelism between phase and ego organization may be illusory. Developmental and maturational sequences, while in continuous interaction with each other, may follow different timetables. It is important to note that single areas, such as cognition, perception, object representation, have been studied successfully, but the sequences of the interaction between them remain unclear. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the role of primary and secondary autonomy or the conflict-free sphere of ego functions. It seems easier to follow those functions which lead toward differentiation and specificity of action than to observe and understand the synthetic and integrative ego function which binds components together into larger units.

Studies of object relationships were rewarded by an increased understanding of attachment, bonding, the earliest dyadic systems of the primary objects and infants. Mahler et al. (1975) contributed the most precise formulation of steps toward sepa-

ration and individuation based on object interaction and differentiation of object and self. Nevertheless, much still needs to be done to understand these processes of object relationship in the context of libidinal phase organization and the role of various ego functions.

In proposing the concept of developmental lines, Anna Freud (1965) states,

Without doubt we need more for our assessments than these selected developmental scales which are valid for isolated parts of the child's personality only, not for its totality. What we are looking for are the basic *interactions* between id and ego and their various developmental levels, and also age-related sequences of them which, in importance, frequency, and regularity, are comparable to the maturational sequence of libidinal stages or the gradual unfolding of the ego functions [p. 63].

It is clear that lines of development are conceived to be:

1. *units* of interaction between id and ego
2. lines of developmental *levels*
3. units which are either similar to libidinal phase organization or to ego function
4. *units* that follow processes which in importance, frequency, and regularity equal those of either phase or ego evolution.

I have repeated Anna Freud's definition in order to emphasize the four characteristics she ascribes to lines of development and in order to discuss the many issues which are implied and how much there is still to be learned. As can be seen, Anna Freud looked for units of interaction, specifically between the ego and the id, and furthermore wished that one could compare these interactions and their sequences to the maturational sequences of libidinal stages on the one hand, and to the *gradual* evolution of ego function on the other. The ego apparatus underlying cognition, speech, and motor function are subject to discontinuous maturation, while other ego functions such as defense function, reality testing, and adaptation seem to be gradual in their emergence.

Anna Freud (1983) explains, "This is not to imply, of course, that uncontested developmental advances do not exist. Func-

tions such as perception and apperception, memory, logical and symbolic thinking, perhaps even the child's developing sense of time, are entirely dependent on ego maturation" (p. 109). Here she addresses herself to the sequences of the evolving ego apparatus and conflict-free functions. These areas have traditionally been studied primarily by others rather than psychoanalysts, except when conflicts invade these functions and interfere with their expressions or further maturation. But the relationships between these maturational sequences and those which follow developmental phase organization also are part of the developmental lines. The timing of libidinal phase organization and the timing of the emergence of the maturational developmental steps became equally important for Anna Freud. As she proceeds to spell out the lines of development, she asks, "Is there a consensus about the age when the developmental steps towards recognition of danger is finally taken? . . . how long does a child's advance in motoric skill outstrip his appreciation of potential danger?" (1983, p. 111).

As we follow maturational processes, we can learn more about the sequences of the aggressive drive. When we refer to its maturational sequence, we assume that the biological matrix is significant. Thus it seems that the unraveling of the developmental lines, the coordination of units of psychic function, will help us to understand the links between the psychological and somatic spheres. Such a formulation, therefore, maintains Freud's propositions regarding the source of the drive, the *biological* demand on psychic life, without making psychoanalytic psychology a separate, independent system.

The theory of development based on careful investigation of our clinical data will assist us in deciding whether we can link drive to motivation as the only characteristic of a pure psychology, or a psychology of mental processes only. Moreover, we shall understand the apparatus of the ego better, for all its component parts also seem to follow a maturational timetable closely linked to biological growth. This is connected with the timetable of maturational and developmental processes, or, as Anna Freud (1983) suggests, one "might also move to establish a date when children can be expected to have concern for their health. . . . At which level of development can we expect children simply

to go to bed when they are tired or to eat when their body demands nourishment?" (p. 112). These interests address themselves to the normal development of the child. In the context of Anna Freud's work, these issues are equally significant for the understanding of pathological processes such as precocity and delay, arrest, fixation and regression, and refer to both normal and pathological development.

The uneven progression in the various developmental lines caused by the differences in maturational and developmental sequences influences the technique of psychoanalytic therapy. Whenever a clinical picture can be differentiated from neurotic disorders, ego disorders, and borderline conditions, we can establish the diagnosis of developmental pathology which creates its own inner tension, anxiety, symptom formation, etc. Careful examination of children reveals the frequent presence of this disorder side by side with neurotic difficulties. Thus the study of developmental lines will afford us new insights into the pathways of different disorders. Here future investigations can draw on the work of Anna Freud.

The demand to observe units of behavior and hence the interactions between all the structural components forces us to spell out the relationship of each component to the other, an endeavor that leads to a clarification of the nature of conflicts, the dynamic relations between all the structural components, as well as their progressive differentiations and newer forms of integration.

The attempt to unify the various divergent modes of the developmental processes exposes the inherent problem in the psychoanalytic theory of development. It is their complexity that makes it so difficult to find appropriate relationships between various ego functions and id-ego functions. Furthermore, Anna Freud assumes that interaction units should be characterized by regularity, frequency, and significance. Thus she expects the individual differences in the alliance between id and ego expressions to be viewed within the context of predictable, orderly progressions. Anna Freud demands new investigations in which the Metapsychological Assessment Profile should aid in exploring the totality of psychic function.

Anna Freud defined lines of development in terms of id, ego,

and superego influences as they join into units; it is not surprising that later she elaborated on the result of interactions between drive and ego-superego development *and* their reaction to environmental influences, that is to say, between maturation, adaptation, and structuralization. She orders the data from interactional sequences to a wider unit. Joseph Sandler (1983) addresses this problem in the following way:

A psychoanalytic 'normal' psychology needs to be first and foremost psychoanalytic, and should not aspire to be a 'general' psychology. This means accepting the view that there can be many legitimate co-existing psychologies, for different purposes, constructed from different points of view. And a psychoanalytic normal psychology, a psychoanalytic developmental psychology, or any other form of psychoanalytic psychology needs, I believe, to be as congruent as possible with psychoanalytic clinical theory. Psychoanalysts and others who are interested in constructing a general psychology are concerned, in regard to this interest, with aspects and levels of theory which are very far from those which normally concern psychoanalytic practitioners [p. 37].

Sandler differentiates a psychoanalytic psychology from a general psychology, dependent on the point of view of "legitimate co-existing psychologies." At the present state of knowledge this suggestion appears to be reasonable, as does his request that for psychoanalysts theories should be congruent with our clinical findings. But, in addition to the differences between psychologies due to different points of view, methods of investigation, and interests, there are differences in the nature of maturational and developmental processes. Even from a psychoanalytic point of view, the clinical investigation may not yield the appropriate, complete information. Those who psychoanalytically study developmental and maturational aspects of the various ego functions may arrive at different conclusions than those who study other ego functions, such as defense, reality testing, and adaptation.

Anna Freud (1965) states, "far from being theoretical abstractions, developmental lines, in the sense here used, are historical realities which, when assembled, convey a convincing picture of an individual child's personal achievements, or, on the other

hand, of his failures in personality development" (p. 64). It is characteristic of Anna Freud that whenever she employs propositions in ordering data, these are always close to clinical considerations.

The concept of developmental lines refers to clusters, that is, organized subunits of mental function. Anna Freud stresses that there is either a correspondence or a disharmony between the lines; that each is studied in connection with other subunits. It may be self-evident that the concept of developmental lines demands that we follow sequences throughout development. This demand gains significance when new theories limit themselves to one or another period only, most often the earliest years of development, and sees genetic and dynamic implications in an attempt to explain subsequent pathology. The weight of Anna Freud's argument in proposing developmental lines is to ask that we give equal consideration to all sequences and follow them throughout development. She says (1983), "To achieve a thorough understanding of the ebb and flow of development, its progressive and regressive trends, its inhibitions, failures, partial and total arrests, it is essential to accompany the child uninterruptedly through at least the first dozen years of his growth" (p. 113).

It is evident that the term "lines" of development does not imply linear progression, nor is "development" applicable to specific, isolated functions or components of the mental apparatus. Acknowledging that the word "lines" may be somewhat misleading, Anna Freud (1980) explained that she had chosen it precisely because it was an axis or line that cut across the usual psychoanalytic referents of id, ego, superego, economic and dynamic considerations. Moreover, such lines also connect levels of achievements, for example, in the child's capacity to relate to other children, attainments that are in some respects comparable to developmental milestones. In her later writings (1970–1980), she often used the alternative description of "steps on a ladder," with each "step" representing a different level of integration, and the "ladder" or "line" standing for the links between these levels. Thus, when she outlined (1965) what was to serve as a prototype for all developmental lines, she did not speak of the development of object relations, but referred to it as

the line "from dependency to emotional self-reliance to adult object relationships." This line includes the biological unity between the mother-infant couple, Mahler's subdivisions, Melanie Klein's part-objects, ambivalent relations characterized by certain ego attitudes, and the object relations based on preoedipal and oedipal phase expressions and those based on latency, pre-adolescent, and adolescent modes of interactions with the object.

Then there are the lines culminating in body independence—from sucking to rational eating, from wetting and soiling to bladder and bowel control, from irresponsibility to responsibility in body management. Another line traces the sequence leading from the body to the toy and from play to work, the correlation between body and toy paralleling the steps from play to work. The complex interlocking between these lines, for example, as illustrated by Anna Freud (1965) in the attempt to answer the question, "When is a child ready to enter nursery school?" exemplifies her approach, but it also highlights the enormity of the task she has placed before us. It is obvious that these steps in the proposed lines involve psychic units which reflect all structural components. Moreover, in order to explore their psychoanalytic meaning, we are asked to view lines of development as part of the assessment process with her Metapsychological Profile, a picture "which contains dynamic, genetic, economic, structural, and adaptive data" (1965, p. 139). Thus she reaffirms the traditional psychoanalytic position and insists that whatever she has added needs integration with the body of psychoanalytic metapsychological propositions. As can be seen, each of these lines represents a combination of all structural components. Each intercepts or correlates with the others, specifically with dependency-independency. The emphasis is on the *sequences of progression*, the timetable of emergence and consolidation, the variations of these within the normal expected development or the deviation from it. Progression is studied with as much attention as regression, not only of drive components, but also that of the ego, with its severe consequences.

In this context the notion of discontinuity and continuity of psychic function is important. While Anna Freud does not elaborate on this point, she takes it for granted that any line of development implies progression and psychic structure formation.

Addressing herself to such factors as dependency-independency, she sees these in the context of id-ego-superego structures. As new structures supersede old ones, new hierarchies are formed and new structures are deposited or precede new functions. At the same time we assume that all past experiences are still available and can be retrieved. Thus one must consider progressive and regressive pulls within the lines of development.

Furthermore, it can be seen that Anna Freud, in her examples of developmental lines, relies on data based on observations of behavior, but behavioral expressions do not give us direct clues to the inner psychic representation, fantasies, and wishes, conscious and unconscious. On the other hand, she expects that statements about lines of development are made on the basis of the psychoanalysis of children and adults.

Anna Freud does not view the concept of developmental lines as a metapsychological concept, but since she proposed it, others, in constructing their own lines, have at times implied metapsychological considerations which were never intended to be implied in this concept.

After all, these units of functions and the correlation between them reveal the capacity of the ego to unite, synthesize, integrate, and organize new developmental levels. It is this capacity which Anna Freud (1970–80) emphasized when she increasingly turned her interest to normal development. She proposed that in analogy to the formation of structured symptoms, we regard the child's progressive achievements as compromise formations. Normal and welcome attainments, too, are multiply determined.

What happens . . . in psychopathology can be shown to happen, though with more adaptive results, in the area of normal growth. Here, too, the child's ego relies on the synthetic function. This integrates at every stage of a developmental line the various determining factors which are active on it. It forms compromises between them which result in the construction of the respective intermediary stations. The latter are normal, and the compromise formations adaptive, provided the responsible, determining elements are normal and typical. . . . On the other hand, aberrant features in [endowment, drives, sensory equipment, structuralization, and external circumstances] . . . are so

frequent that they are almost the order of the day. . . . Since even under these unfavorable conditions synthesis continues to function, it inevitably incorporates elements which are detrimental to development [1978, p. 105f.].

The resulting disorder may be a developmental deviation, in contrast to those which are due to neurotic interference in development. In the first case, the pathological development is not based on fixation and regression. The consequences of uneven development cannot be understood by the model of neurotic conflicts. While the one may coexist with the other, both must be viewed dynamically and genetically in psychoanalytic therapy.

This leads Anna Freud (1965) to say that in order to arrive at a meaningful assessment, the diagnostician will have to choose between a number of categorizations such as the following:

- (1) that, in spite of current manifest behavior disturbances, the personality growth of the child is essentially healthy and falls within the wide range of "variations of normality";
- (2) that existent pathological formations (symptoms) are of a transitory nature and can be classed as by-products of developmental strain;
- (3) that there is permanent drive regression to previously established fixation points which leads to conflicts of a neurotic type and gives rise to infantile neuroses and character disorders;
- (4) that there is drive regression as above plus simultaneous ego and superego regressions which lead to infantilism, borderline, delinquent, or psychotic disturbances;
- (5) that there are primary deficiencies of an organic nature or early deprivations which distort development and structuralization and produce retarded, defective, and non-typical personalities;
- (6) that there are destructive processes at work (of organic, toxic, psychic, known or unknown origin) which have effected, or are on the point of effecting, a disruption of mental growth [p. 147].

These categories express Anna Freud's conviction that both pathology and normality are best understood in reference to developmental processes. There are the developmental deviations, points of developmental fixation and developmental re-

gression, developmental deviations secondary to other influences, and primary developmental disorders. Thus, employing the concept of developmental lines leads directly to the refinement of clinical issues. The developmental location of disorders has been an integral part of psychoanalytic thinking since the outline of libidinal phases. The significant new dimension is the demand to follow developmental organization from level to level with the new alliances of all psychic agencies and structural components.

The assessment of the child's developmental lines will permit us to study the transformation of earlier pathology during succeeding stages, the reorganization of preoedipal and oedipal conflicts during latency, adolescence, and adult life; and it will make genetic interpretations and reconstructions of succeeding levels of development more precise.

The child's construction of reality and of the inner representational world is dependent on the basic instinctual and ego apparatus and the changing object interactions from the beginning of life onward. These considerations have been part of psychoanalytic theory and clinical studies for some time. With the concept of developmental lines, however, Anna Freud has offered a frame of reference for the systematic study and continuous assessment of the child developing within the variations of normality as well as the child who, because of his pathology, requires treatment. She has given us clear directions for new research, for the refinement of psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice.

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